

TALKING BACK

Who Killed the Story?

I travel the college lecture circuit with a slide show and narration on the conspiracy behind the John Kennedy assassination. The presentation includes what I believe to be photographic proof of the conspiracy, the bootleg Zapruder film and slides from the scene in Dallas. I often lecture in distant places like Akron and Altoona and Tuscaloosa, far from the eye of the media vortex. I get interviewed by earnest young reporters from W something something or K something something, radio and TV, and what they ask is, "If everything you say is true, Mr. Katz, and we're not saying it isn't, why hasn't the media done something about it?"

Now this is a tough one for me to answer because these reporters, freshly graduated from journalism school and inspired by the awesome deeds of Woodward and Bernstein, do not share my cynicism about the media's ability to grasp large-scale conspiracies. I carefully explain that there was no independent media investigation of Dallas like the one of Watergate, that conspiracies are often expressly designed to deceive the media and investigators (were it not for the judicial process, which was neatly sidestepped in the Oswald case, the Watergate coverup might have succeeded), and I add that in many instances the media willfully ignored the factual evidence.

This is blasphemous, heretical. I can see that I am starting to sound crazy to them. But how do I explain the full implications of a Sept. 11, 1966, *New York Times* article entitled, "No Conspiracy, But—Two Assassins Perhaps"?

It seems to me that the tenets of journalism prevent an understanding of the assassination question. The old who-what-when-where does not apply. Those were the pertinent questions in November, 1963. That was a bygone era of journalism when the "facts" of the assassination were spoon-fed to the media by the Dallas district attorney and J. Edgar Hoover. Now it is the Warren Commission critics who are supposed to dish out the answers.

The local radio and TV want me for a quickie interview prior to my lecture. They shove the mike in front of my mouth and want to know what new evidence I have to

offer. I try to explain that the old evidence, the research of Lane and Garrison and Weisberg, is sufficiently convincing. They smirk as if that was just a warm-up question anyway. Then they inquire, on behalf of their listeners, who was behind the murder. I give a rough outline of what is known, but stress that we don't have all the answers. Before the cameras and tapes are clicked off, I quickly interject that it matters that we don't know, that the lingering existence of this haunting question—Who killed JFK?—is radical and powerful and that my ignorance of the true assassins is all our ignorance and all our loss. But the machines have clicked. They do not hear.

Zapruder Film Evidence Distorted

Most assassination researchers agree that the Zapruder home movie of the motorcade is the best evidence of conspiracy. The film was purchased from Zapruder by Time, Inc., and they have refused to release the original. The media treatment of this basic piece of photographic evidence illustrates many of my complaints about assassination coverage. The complaints range from false reporting to journalistic squeamishness to obtuse thinking.

Though the film was never shown on television, Dan Ratner did recount a description of the movie for CBS viewers in 1966, and he told of the President's violent forward motion after the impact of the head shot. Now the film is such important evidence precisely because the President jolts violently backward after the head shot, a reaction inconsistent with Oswald's alleged location to the rear. I have seen bootleg copies of the film where Ratner's voice is dubbed in, and it is shocking to hear him saying "violently forward" at the exact moment the film reveals the President lurching backward.

At the New Orleans Clay Shaw trial in 1969, district attorney Jim Garrison subpoenaed the film from Time, Inc. It was shown a dozen times to the jury and the courtroom audience, which included representatives of the national media. It had a devastating effect. Reporters scrambled over to the spectators, asking for quotes on what they had just viewed. Apparently these crack jour-

nalists lacked the confidence to convey firsthand the horror of the film. The constraints of journalism precluded a statement, without attribution, that would cast doubt on the lone assassin theory. The burden was too heavy. The drama of the first public showing of the Zapruder film escaped unreported.

At the Politics of Conspiracy Conference, held recently at Boston University, a very clear print of the film was presented. The *Boston Globe*, which for 11 years gave scant attention to critics of the Warren Commission lone gunman conclusion, reported of the film "... seconds later, another shot hits Kennedy from the front ... Enlargements of the Zapruder film seem to show a second gunman on the grassy knoll in front of the President."

This is quite an admission for the *Globe*, or for any major newspaper. To say the President was hit from the front is to say that Oswald could not have done it alone, is to admit that we do not know who killed Kennedy, is to admit that the *Globe* has been wrong all these years. The effect, however, was not that pronounced, for the above quotes appeared in the seventeenth paragraph of an article on the conference. This page one article of February 3 began instead with a desultory rundown on one of the conference participants.

But the *Globe* article, and a more sensitive piece in *The New York Times* on the conspiracy conference, suggests that major media may now be grudgingly considering the massive doubts about Dallas. I remember the snickers which greeted Jim Garrison's 1966 statement that the JFK assassination was carried out by a cabal of anti-Castro Cubans, the CIA, and high government officials. Walter Cronkite pontificated on the absurdity of thinking such disparate groups could work together in a clandestine action. Certainly Watergate has bestowed some credibility on the conspiracy analysis of politics, and perhaps that corrected vision can now be focused on murky events of the recent past, specifically the assassinations.

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